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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship of (1) previous course-instructor rating feedback, (2) class size, and (3) various instructor personal characteristics, with the tendency of college instructors to make large errors in predicting course-instructor ratings by their students. Significant over- and under-predictors were identified for each of four principal components of student response. Previous student rating feedback was not related to making significant errors in prediction. Instructor content area was related to predictive errors regarding instructor-student interactions. Instructor age and teaching experience were related to significant over-prediction regarding instructor competence and classroom organization. (Author)

AN INVESTIGATION OF INSTRUCTOR ACCURACY IN PREDICTING COURSE-INSTRUCTOR RATINGS BY STUDENTS

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BACKGROUND

The collection of course-instructor ratings (CIR) by students is a standard practice in many U. S. colleges and universities. One use of this information is to provide formal student feedback to instructors. Eble (1970) notes that CIR results seen only by the instructors provide a widely accepted means of improving teaching. In discussing the effect of student ratings upon teaching skills, Eble states:

> The skillful teacher, like the skillful actor, may not need the feedback such questionnaires can provide. He may already possess a keen and constant sense of the relationship between what he is doing and the way students respond. In addition, the teacher has other measures--tests, papers, oral reports--which give him information about the way a course is going. But teachers must acquire teaching skill, and even skilled teachers fall into comfortable routines...(1970, p.34)

In short, Eble suggests that the CIR procedure provides continuing student feedback which can aid an instructor in developing and maintaining his teaching skills by improving the accuracy of his perception of how students respond to his teaching activities.

Recently, several researchers have investigated the feedback effects of course-instructor ratings upon college instructors. Two types of criterion measures have been used as dependent variables: (a) changes between midsemester and end of semester student ratings (Miller, 1971; Braunstein, Klein, and Pachla, 1973; Emmer, McBurnette, & Davis 1974); (b) differences in end of semester ratings between instructors who have received midsemester CIR feedback and a control group which did not receive feedback (Centra 1973a). These criterion measures do not directly assess the effects of student feedback upon the accuracy of instructor perceptions of their students' viewpoints toward the course.

Two previous researchers have considered the relationship between instructor self descriptions and ratings by their students. Webb and Nolan (1955) report a correlation of .62 between student ratings of instructor traits and instructor self ratings. Centra (1973b) found a median correlation of .21 between instructor self ratings and student ratings across 21 CIR items. Three major conclusions can be drawn from Centra's study:

1. Instructors generally rated themselves more favorably than their students did.

2. The greatest instructor-student disagreement centered on CIR items dealing with teacher-student interactions.

3. There were no significant effects for instructor sex or teaching experience on accuracy of prediction. Natural science instructors tended to underestimate the course workload, while education and applied science instructors tended to overestimate the reported workload.

Social perception has been defined as the ability to interpret the viewpoint of others (Tagiuri, 1969). It is operationally defined as the discrepancy between the responses of a subject and a judge's predictions of those responses. Within the context of course-instructor ratings, instructors could predict the mean response of their students on each item of a student rating instrument. If the discrepancy between instructor predictions and actual student ratings is small, the instructor's social perception is considered to be accurate. (Note the difference between instructor self ratings used by Webb and Nolan (1955) and Centra (1973b) and instructor predictions of their student ratings utilized to measure accuracy of social perception.)

Distance scores ($D = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{n} (X-Y)^2}$; where X and Y are judge's predictions and subject's responses respectively) have traditionally been used as an operational measure of social perception (Dymond, 1949, Gage, 1953; Gage, Runkel and Chattergee, 1963). Cronbach (1958) provided several methodological criticisms of the distance score as a social perception measure. Two of these criticisms were:

1. The squaring procedure "throws out" information regarding the direction of prediction errors.

2. The distance score technique sums differences across heterogenous items.

Very few recent researchers have utilized distance scores as a measure of social perception (for exceptions see Daniellian, 1967; and Cline & Richards, 1962). No one has offered a methodological innovation for meeting Cronbach's criticisms of distance scores.

To summarize, previous researchers have not investigated the effects of CIR feedback or other instructor characteristics upon the accuracy of instructor social perception regarding their students' viewpoints. One factor which has undoubtedly limited recent research is the methodological complexity of using distance scores as an operational measure of social perception.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects for this study were all instructors in the University of Texas at Austin Colleges of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Humanities, Natural Sciences, and the School of Communication who participated in the Course-Instructor Survey during the 1973 Fall Semester. The sample was limited to instructors teaching in "traditional" classroom settings, namely one teacher and 10 to 49 students. The sample instructors estimated their mean student response for each of 24 items from the Course-Instructor Survey: General Questionnaire prior to receiving the results of their student ratings. Appendix B. contains the data collection instrument.

Data analysis procedures consisted of four separate steps:

1. *Principal Components Analysis* was performed on student mean item responses for all of the sample instructors. Principal components with eigen roots greater than one were extracted and rotated to a Varimax criterion. Principal component scores were computed for each sample instructor.

2. *Instructor Predictions* were computed by applying the principal components weights from step 1 to the individual instructor predictions of their students' mean item responses. A predicted score analogous to the principal component scores in step 1 was computed for each instructor.

3. *Instructor Predictive Accuracy* was measured by subtracting the actual principal component score (based upon student ratings) from the instructors' prediction. This operation can be represented mathematically as follows:

$$PA_{ij} = IP_{ij} - PC_{ij}$$

where PA_{ij} represents the predictive accuracy score of instructor "i" on principal component "j", IP is the instructor's prediction for component j, and PC is the instructor's principal component score based upon the responses of his students. Thus PA is a measure of instructor predictive accuracy within each independent dimension of the CIR instrument. A significant error in predictive accuracy is defined as $PA_{ij} > \overline{PA} + \sigma_{PA}$ (overprediction) or $PA_{ij} < \overline{PA} - \sigma_{PA}$ (underprediction).

4. *Chi Square Analysis* was performed on the characteristics of instructors who were categorized as over- or under-predictors on each principal component.

The analysis procedures in steps 1 and 2 were designed to counter Cronbach's (1958) criticisms of the distance score technique as a measure of social perception. The choice of $\overline{PA} \pm \sigma_{PA}$ as the criterion for defining significant predictive inaccuracy was based upon its use by Centra (1973b) Chi Square was chosen as the final analytical procedure because the bipolar nature of social perception (i.e., significant over- or under-prediction) precludes the use of parametric statistics.

The final subject sample consisted of 318 instructors (79% response rate). Data was collected for seven instructor background characteristics: sex, age, faculty rank, college, teaching experience, class size, and previous CIR experience. Appendix D provides a detailed breakdown of instructor background characteristics.

A principal components analysis and varimax rotation (Veldman, 1967) was performed on the mean student responses for 22 items from the Course-Instructor Survey: General Questionnaire (Appendix A). Items 27 and 29 were omitted due to the large proportion of instructors who failed to predict their student ratings. Four principal components which accounted for 73.7% of the original variance were extracted. Analysis of the CIR items which loaded heavily on each component resulted in the following names:

(a) Component I (eigen root = 11.13): Student-Instructor Interactions

(b) Component II (eigen root = 2.52): Student Expectations

(c) Component III (eigen root = 1.24): Instructor Competence

(d) Component IV (eigen root = 1.31): Classroom Organization

Appendix C provides the General Questionnaire items which loaded .40 or higher on each principal component.

The summary results of the Chi Square Analysis are outlined in Table I below:

Table I

Summary of the Chi Square Tests

	Over-Predictors				Under-Predictors			
	Comp I	Comp II	Comp III	Comp IV	Comp I	Comp II	Comp III	Comp IV
Class Size (df=2)	ns	$p < .001$	ns	ns	ns		ns	ns
Instructor Sex (df=1)	ns	$p < .01$	ns	ns	ns		ns	ns
Instructor Tenure (df=1)	ns	$p = .05$	$p < .05$	$p < .01$	ns		ns	$p < .01$
Instructor Age (df=3)	ns	$p < 05$	$p < .001$	$p < .01$	ns		ns	$p < .05$
Instructor Teaching Experience (df=2)	ns	ns	$p < .01$	$p < .01$	ns		ns	$p < .01$
Instructor Previous CIR Feedback (df=2)	ns	ns	ns	$p < .01$	ns		ns	$p < .05$
Instructor Content Area (df=3)	$p < .01$	$p < .0001$	$p < .01$	ns	$p < .01$		ns	$p < .01$

Note that no Chi Square tests are reported for the under-predictors on Component II (Student Expectations). The distribution of instructor predictive accuracy scores for Student Expectations was skewed to an extent that no instructors were more than one standard deviation below the mean.

Summary interpretations of the significant Chi Square tests are presented in Table 2 below. A more detailed presentation of expected and observed frequencies is available upon request.

Table 2

Significant Chi Square Tests for each Principal Component

1. Component I: Instructor-Student Interactions

   a. Over-predictors: instructors in the College of Natural Sciences
   b. Under-predictors: instructors in Humanities and in the School of Communication

2. Component II: Student Expectations

   a. Over-predictors: instructors in classes with 10-20 students
      female instructors
      nontenured instructors
      instructors who are 20-25 years old
      instructors in the College of Humanities

3. Component III: Instructor Competence

   a. Over-predictors: nontenured instructors
      instructors over age 30
      instructors with more than 6 years teaching experience
      instructors in the School of Communication

4. Component IV: Classroom Organization

   a. Over-predictors: tenured instructors
      instructors over age 30
      instructors with more than 6 years teaching experience
      instructors with more than 6 courses previously rated by students

   b. Under-predictors: nontenured instructors
      instructors under 30 years old
      instructors with less than 2 years teaching experience
      instructors with less than 6 courses previously rated by students

DISCUSSION

The overprediction on Component I by instructors in the College of Natural Science complements the findings of Centra (1973b) regarding a tendency for Natural Scientists to underestimate the course workload. These results suggest a stereotype of the Natural Scientist as an introverted individual who does not actively interact with students (Roe, 1957). The significant underpredictions on Component I by instructors in Humanities and the School of Communication emphasizes the possibility that instructor content area may be a useful predictor of directional errors in predicting the viewpoints of students. However, at this time both of the above interpretations must be accepted as tentative and deserving further study.

The interpretation of the results for Component II (Student Expectations) is complicated by the fact that a large proportion of the Humanities classes taught by young nontenured instructors at the University of Texas are introductory foreign language courses. These courses are traditionally not a favorite among students, therefore one might anticipate low student ratings in terms of their expectations for the courses and consequently a tendency for instructors to over-predict.

The results of identifying over-predictors on Components III and IV are subject to a very interesting interpretation. Both of these components are related to "teaching expertise." In both cases it appears that experienced teachers become over confident regarding student perceptions of their teaching skills. In contrast, inexperienced instructors tended to significantly under-predict their students' responses on Component IV.

Finally, it should be noted that across all four principal components, instructors with no previous CIR feedback experience did not make more significant errors of prediction than did instructors with CIR feedback experience.

CONCLUSIONS

Two primary conclusions may be drawn from this study. First, a technique for measuring social perception has been demonstrated. This procedure seems to satisfy the methodological criticisms of distance scores as a measure of social perception (Cronbach, 1958).

Second, the results indicate that previous CIR feedback does not reduce the probability of making errors in predicting student responses. On the other hand, instructor content area was related to significant prediction errors regarding Instructor-Student Interactions while teaching experience was directly related to making significant over-predictions regarding "teaching expertise"(Components III and IV). The survey nature of this study requires that results be accepted somewhat tentatively; however, if replicated they offer some definite guidelines to educators interested in developing teaching skills among college faculty members with diverse previous teaching experience and content specialities (Popham, 1974).

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Appendix A

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN -- COURSE-INSTRUCTOR SURVEY: GENERAL QUESTIONNAIRE

DIRECTIONS: PLEASE MARK YOUR RESPONSES TO EACH ITEM ON THE SEPARATE ANSWER SHEET.

1. My classification is:

   A = Graduate B = Senior C = Junior D = Sophomore E = Freshman

2. My sex is:

   A = Male B = Female

3. My final grade in this course will probably be:

   A = A B = B C = C D = D E = F

4. My overall grade-point average at UT Austin is:

   A = 3.50 - 4.00 B = 3.00 - 3.49 C = 2.50 - 2.99 D = 2.00 - 2.49 E = Less than 2.00

5&6. The college or school in which I am enrolled is: (Mark only one response)

   5A = Arts & Sciences 5B = Business Admin. 5C = Education 5D = Engineering 5E = Fine Arts
   6A = Pharmacy 6B = Architecture 6C = Communication 6D = Nursing 6E = Other

7. I took this course to satisfy:

   A = Major or minor field requirements
   B = Other specific degree requirements
   C = Elective credits required for degree
   D = Non-degree requirements (e.g., teacher certification)
   E = No requirements at all

Items 8 - 32 all use the same response scale in which:

A = Definitely Yes
B = Yes
C = Uncertain or neutral
D = No
E = Definitely No

Do not mark responses to items which are not relevant to this course.

Please explain or elaborate on your responses in the COMMENTS section of the answer sheet.

8. The instructor seemed to be sensitive to the feelings and needs of students.
9. The instructor seemed well-prepared for lecture or discussion.
10. The instructor showed a scholarly grasp of the course material.
11. The instructor showed confidence before the class.
12. The instructor paced the course well.
13. The instructor kept his lectures and class discussions focused on the subject of the course.
14. The instructor usually seemed to be aware of whether the class was following his presentation with understanding.
15. The instructor used clear, relevant examples.
16. The instructor's mannerisms or habits reduced the effectiveness of his teaching.
17. The instructor's speech and lecture style contributed to his teaching effectiveness.
18. The instructor made me feel free to ask questions, disagree, and express my ideas.
19. The instructor was intellectually stimulating (thought-provoking, or caused me to do additional studying on my own.)
20. The instructor showed a genuine interest in teaching the course.
21. The instructor was generally accessible to students outside of class.
22. The instructor gave adequate instructions concerning assignments.
23. The instructor commented informatively on tests and assignments.

24. The tests were usually graded and returned promptly.

25. I was satisfied with the way the performance of students was evaluated in this course.

26. The textbooks were adequate for this course.

27. The reference books and materials in the library were adequate for this course.

28. I feel that I profited from the out-of-class assignments.

29. I feel that I profited from the laboratory (or discussion section) for this course.

30. Before the semester began, I thought I would enjoy this course.

31. Before the semester began, I thought this course would be of value to me.

32. At this point in time, I feel that this course will be (or has already been) of value to me.

For items 33 - 40, choose the appropriate response from those given for each item.

33. The amount of outside preparation required for this course was:

A = Excessive
B = High
C = About right
D = Low
E = Insignificant

34. For each hour of class, the average amount of time I spent on this course outside of class was about:

A = 2 hours or more
B = 1½ hours
C = 1 hour
D = ½ hour
E = Less than ½ hour

35. Compared with the effort I usually put into a course, my effort in this course was:

A = Well above average
B = Above average
C = Average
D = Below average
E = Well below average

36. I met with the instructor outside of class to discuss the course:

A = Many times
B = A few times
C = Only once or twice
D = Never, because I couldn't find him
E = Never, because I never tried

37. I was absent from class:

A = Never
B = Once or twice
C = 3 or 4 times
D = 5 to 9 times
E = 10 times or more

38. Compared with all the instructors I have had, both in high school and in college, this instructor was:

A = One of the best
B = Above average
C = Average
D = Below average
E = Far below average

39. Compared with all the courses I have had, both in high school and in college this course was:

A = One of the best
B = Above average
C = Average
D = Below average
E = Far below average

40. Compared with what I expected to get from this course, I feel I got:

A = Far more than I expected
B = More than I expected
C = What I expected
D = Less than I expected
E = Far less than I expected

PLEASE NOTE THESE SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE COMMENTS SECTION OF THE ANSWER SHEET.
Many instructors have indicated that written comments help them understand better the responses given to the multiple-choice items, and that the written comments frequently contain very helpful and constructive recommendations. Please take the time and effort to:

a. Explain or elaborate on your responses to the previous 40 items.
b. Suggest ways in which the instructor can improve his teaching.
c. Suggest ways in which the course can be improved.

Appendix B

Instructor Self Rating Form

Name:_____ Course:_____ Course Unique No:_____

I. Background Information. Please fill in the blank or put a check by the appropriate response for each item below. All information will be kept strictly confidential.

1. Sex: (1)___Female (2)___Male

2. Faculty Rank: (1)___Teaching Assistant (5)___Lecturer
(2)___Assistant Instructor (6)___Associate Professor
(3)___Instructor (7)___Professor
(4)___Assistant Professor

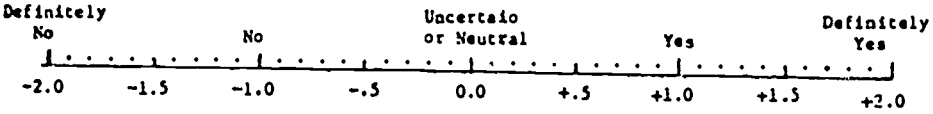
3. Age: (1)___20-25 (2)___26-30 (3)___31-35 (4)___36-40 (5)___41-50
(6)___51-60 (7)___Over 60

4. Total Years of college-level teaching experience:_____

5. In your previous teaching experience, how many times (total number of courses) have you received formal student ratings such as the Course-Instructor Survey Results?
(1)___No previous experience (4)___3-4 courses (7)___ 9-10 courses
(2)___ 0 courses (5)___5-6 courses (8)___11-15 courses
(3)___1-2 courses (6)___7-8 courses (9)___more than 15 courses

6. Of the courses you have previously taught, both at U.T. Austin and elsewhere, in approximately what proportion did you receive formal student ratings?
(1)___No previous experience (3)___about 25% (5)___about 75%
(2)___None (4)___about 50% (6)___100%

II. Instructor Self Ratings. We are attempting to determine how accurately an instructor can judge the opinions of his students about his course and teaching techniques prior to receiving formal student feedback. For this study, student opinion has been conceptualized as a number line which extends from -2.0 to +2.0. In terms of the Course-Instructor Survey questionnaire these numbers are assigned as follows:



If a class as a whole perceives an instructor as being very strong on a particular trait (e.g., paced the course well), the location of their opinions would be near the +2.0 end of the scale (e.g., 1.9). If the class members "generally agreed" that the course was paced well, the location of opinion might be 1.1 while if the class was somewhat uncertain whether the instructor paced the course appropriately, the consensus of opinion might be .3. Finally, if many students felt that the course was not paced well, the location of student opinion on the scale might be a -1.2.

The items below were drawn from the Course-Instructor Survey questionnaire used in your department for the Fall Semester 1973. For each item estimate the opinion of your Fall 1973 students enrolled in the course indicated at the top of this page, using the -2.0 to +2.0 scale described above. In the blank at the left of each item write the numerical value of the point on the scale which you feel corresponds to the average opinion of your students. A sample item has been marked to provide an example.

+1.7 1. (example item) The instructor presented the material coherently.

___ 2. The instructor seemed to be sensitive to the feelings and needs of students.

___ 3. The instructor seemed well-prepared for lecture or discussion.

___ 4. The instructor showed confidence before the class.

___ 5. The instructor kept his lectures and class discussions focused on the subject of the course.

___ 6. The instructor usually seemed to be aware of whether the class was following his presentation with understanding.

___ 7. The instructor used clear, relevant examples.

___ 8. The instructor's speech and lecture style contributed to his teaching effectiveness.

___ 9. The instructor made me feel free to ask questions, disagree, and express my ideas.

___10. The instructor was intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking.

___11. The instructor showed genuine interest in teaching the course.

___12. The instructor was generally accessible to students outside of class.

___13. The instructor commented informatively on tests and assignments.

___14. The tests were usually graded and returned promptly.

___15. Before the semester began, I thought I would enjoy this course.

___16. Before the semester began, I thought this course would be of value to me.

___17. At this point in time, I feel that this course will be (or has already been) of value to me.

___18. The instructor paced the course well.

___19. I was satisfied with the way the performance of students was evaluated in this course.

___20. The textbooks were adequate for this course.

___21. The reference books and materials in the library were adequate for this course.

___22. I feel that I profited from the out-of-class assignments.

___23. I feel that I profited from the laboratory (or discussion section) for this course.

III. Summary Ratings by the Students. For the two items below utilize the following scale.

Far below Average		Below Average		Average		Above Average		One of the Best
-2.0	-1.5	-1.0	-.5	0.0	+.5	+1.0	+1.5	+2.0

___1. Compared with all the courses I have had, both in high school and in college, this course was:

___2. Compared with all instructors I have had, both in high school and in college, this instructor was:

IV. Instructor Evaluation of the Course-Instructor Survey System

____1. How valuable do you feel formal student ratings are as a means for you to improve teaching?

A. Very valuable
B. Useful for improving certain aspects of teaching
C. Of marginal value
D. Fairly useless

____2. Please explain briefly why you participate in the Course-Instructor Survey.

Appendix C

Independent Dimensions of the
Course-Instructor Survey General Questionnaire

Component I - Student-Instructor Interactions (eigenroot=11.13)	
Item Description	Principal Component Loading
1. Instructor made me feel free to ask questions, disagree, and express my ideas.	.9082
2. The instructor seemed to be sensitive to the feelings and needs of the students.	.8462
3. The instructor usually seemed to be aware of whether the class was following his presentation with understanding.	.6965
4. The instructor commented informatively on tests and assignments.	.6965
5. The instructor was generally accessible to students outside of class.	.6354
6. The instructor's speech and lecture style contributed to his teaching effectiveness.	.6270
7. I was satisfied with the way the performance of students was evaluated in this course.	.6155
8. The instructor used clear, relevant examples.	.6090
9. The instructor showed genuine interest in teaching the course.	.5900
10. Compared with all instructors I have had, both in high school and in college, this instructor was. . .	.5805
11. The instructor was intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking.	.5212
12. At this point in time, I feel that this course will be (or has already been) of value to me.	.5140

Appendix C(continued)

Item Description	Principal Component Loading
Component I - Student-Instructor Interactions (eigenroot=11.13)	
13. The instructor paced the course well.	.4995
14. I feel that I profited from the out-of-class assignments.	.4250
15. Compared with all the courses I have had, both in high school and in college, this course was. . .	.4122
Component II - Student Expectations (eigenroot=2.52)	
1. Before the semester began, I thought this course would be of value to me.	.9259
2. Before the semester began, I thought I would enjoy this course.	.8947
3. At this point in time, I feel that this course will be (or has already been) of value to me.	.4703
Component III - Instructor Competence (eigenroot=1.24)	
1. The instructor showed confidence before the class.	.7817
2. Compared with all the courses I have had, both in high school and in college, this course was. . .	.6971
3. Compared with all instructors I have had, both in high school and in college, this instructor was. . .	.6902
4. The instructor seemed well-prepared for lecture or discussion.	.6697
5. The instructor was intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking.	.6345

Appendix C (continued)

Component III - Instructor Competence (eigenroot=1.24)	
Item Description	Principal Component Loading
6. The instructor's speech and lecture style contributed to his teaching effectiveness.	.6238
7. The textbooks were adequate for this course.	.5921
8. The instructor used clear, relevant examples.	.5799
9. I feel that I profited from the out-of-class assignments.	.5689
10. At this point in time, I feel that this course will be (already has been) of value to me.	.5475
11. The instructor showed genuine interest in teaching the course.	.5395
12. The instructor usually seemed to be aware of whether the class was following his presentation with understanding.	.4326
Component IV - Classroom Organization (eigenroot=1.31)	
1. The tests were usually graded and returned promptly.	.7644
2. The instructor kept his lectures and class discussions focused on the subject of the course.	.7352
3. The instructor seemed well-prepared for lecture or discussion.	.5839
4. The instructor commented informatively on tests and assignments.	.5360
5. The instructor paced the course well.	.4771
6. I was satisfied with the way the performance of students was evaluated in this course.	3986

Appendix D

Background Characteristics of the Subject Sample

(N = 318)

Sex	a. Male b. Female	63% 32%
Faculty Rank	a. Teaching Assts. b. Instructors c. Asst. Professor d. Tenured Professor	40% 15% 30% 14%
Age	a. 20 - 25 years b. 26 - 30 years c. 31 - 35 years d. over 35 years	18% 35% 27% 21%
Teaching Experience	a. Less than 2 years b. 2 - 6 years c. More than 6 years	28% 53% 19%
Previous CIR Participation	a. 0 courses previously rated b. 1-6 courses previously rated c. More than 6 courses previously rated	27% 40% 33%
College	a. Humanities b. Communication c. Social & Behavioral Sciences d. Natural Sciences	44% 10% 24% 22%
Class Size	a. 10-20 students b. 21-30 students c. 31 - 40 students d. 41 - 49 students	40% 30% 19% 11%

*Percentages within each cell may not sum to 100% due to rounding errors.